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SELECT A TOWN

## "Extreme" wrestling ring on the ropes This clothesline is not what neighbors had in mind

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**By Anthony Rifilato**

If EBW sounds like another ubiquitous professional wrestling organization, it's not. EBW stands for Extreme Backyard Wrestling, a three-year-old organization of about 25 Long Island-based wrestlers. And Friedman is the owner, the man who makes it happen, for the simple fact that he owns the ring.

With help from his mother, Elizabeth Friedman-McCormick, the teenager bought a \$5,000, 18-foot by 18-foot ring last year for their backyard, attracted a pool of wrestlers that met every Sunday afternoon for several hours, and broadcast the dramatic matches on public access television.

But wrestling by nature is a noisy form of entertainment. Neighbors have bitterly complained to the Friedmans, the police and the Town of Hempstead that their quiet Sundays in this middle-class neighborhood have been shattered by body slams, clothes lines, pile drives and boisterous role-playing from the wrestling ring. The aspiring wrestlers' entertainment has turned into a dispute over property rights and quality of life.

"When they wrestle they can see over the fence and into our backyard," said one Steele Boulevard neighbor who didn't want her name used. "It's usually on Sunday, but when there's all that bam and boom, it's too much."

In July, Friedman was forced to take the ring down after being issued two violations from the Town of Hempstead officials for lack of a structural permit. Part of the backyard where the ring stood is a now a barren patch of dirt.

"Our priority is safety and the building regulations are in effect to ensure that," a Town spokesperson said.

In May, backyard wrestling was banned in Babylon after complaints from neighbors. The Town spokesperson said that they were investigating a similar ban, but had no definitive plans yet.

Friedman-McCormick sees wrestling as a healthy outlet for her son and his friends and she plans to press the issue to keep the ring.

A court date has been set for Nov. 19 to determine if a permit is needed for the ring, which Friedman-McCormick believes is unnecessary.

"It's a collapsible structure," said Friedman-McCormick, and explained that the ring can be taken down in under twenty minutes. The ring, she said, is only up once a week on Sundays for a couple of hours.

If the judge rules that they must remove the ring, she said they will appeal. Though neighbors would disagree, the Friedmans believe that they are the ones being harassed by people yelling obscenities and calling the police. Through an attorney, the Friedmans have sent letters to neighbors to stop the harassment or face legal action.

Several of the Friedman's neighbors were interviewed for this story but declined to go on the record about the situation.

For now, the ring is kaput and so are the wrestling matches, much to the chagrin of Friedman and his friends.

Friedman, whose wrestling alias is "Jon E", said backyard wrestling is about more than getting together and mimicking moves by The Rock and Stone Cold Steve Austin.

"This keeps everyone out of trouble," said Friedman.

He explained that although they hold matches once a week, a lot of work goes into its production. The group of 25 create the storylines, edit the shows for the one-hour cable access program, and practice moves a few days a week. Unlike a lot of backyard wrestling, Friedman said everything -- from the macho acting to the daring moves -- is completely scripted and none of the members are flippant about the process.

"If someone wants to wrestle with us and isn't serious, we won't allow that person to join," he said.

Clad in baggy jeans, black t-shirt and backwards cap, the nascent wrestling mini-mogul with the cherubic face is priming himself for more ambitious endeavors. In the future, he said he'd like to pursue a career in filmmaking, public speaking, or even advance his wrestling organization into the mainstream.

"I'm learning how to be a good business man and making friends," said Friedman.

His web site, [www.ebwhardcore.com](http://www.ebwhardcore.com), gets over 300 hits per day, he said. He said his organization is one of the most popular on Long Island and friends liken him to a mini-Vince McMahon, because he's the owner and commentator.

Outside of the noise, though, there is still the very real threat of serious injury with extreme wrestling.

In one taped match, wrestlers "Brett Matthewz" and "G. Money" (who are actually brothers) throw each other on thumb-tacks scattered around the ring, albeit with elbow and knee pads on. The majority of moves are mainly throw-downs and body slams. But even those, if not performed properly, can have tragic consequences. Even the World Wrestling Entertainment (formerly the World Wrestling Federation) staunchly opposes backyard wrestling on its web site.

But the wrestlers and parents disagree with the critics.

Friedman-McCormick, who said she's a certified nurse (and actually had a cameo as a nurse in one of the shows), explained that she monitors every match and there hasn't been one injury.

"It's a clean sport and supervised by me and my husband," she said. "It looks worse than it is."

One of the wrestlers, Matt Serra, 19, was professionally trained at Critical Mass, a Hicksville-based professional wrestling school. Friedman said Serra teaches all the wrestlers the proper moves.

Wrestler Mike "Extreme" Murphy, 19, who met Friedman last year through the EBW, said they stick to the basics.

"We don't do any moves we aren't sure about and limit them to power slams and pile drives," said Murphy, who explained that a lot of the effect is created by stomping on the mat. "We don't throw people off the roof and stuff."

Murphy said he can't understand why the Town would take away something that keeps the teens occupied.

"There are a lot more injuries and yelling in football," Murphy said.

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